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SUBJECT: OPERATION MOSHTARAK - SITUATIONAL REPORT FOR FEBRUARY 15, 2010

REF: (A) KABUL 567, (B) KABUL 554, (C) KABUL 543, (D) KABUL 466,
(E) KABUL 115, (F) 09 KABUL 4187

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Operation Moshtarak continued on February 15 in Nad Ali district; however, reports throughout the operational area indicate that the situation was relatively quiet. ISAF Commander, along with Ministers of Defense and Interior, visited the northern Nad Ali area of Showal where they received briefings from ANA and ANP Commanders as well as conducted a walk through the village to meet with locals. In a successful press conference in Lashkar Gah, the ministers called upon the Taliban to lay down their arms and to rejoin their country. After receiving briefings at FOB Dwyer and a meeting with Nad Ali Deputy District Governor, seven members of the Marjah shura traveled to Marjah on the evening of February 15 to work on establishing governance and reintegration efforts there. Governor Mangal traveled to another area of Nad Ali to launch his Governor's Led Eradication Campaign by deploying 20 tractors to the district for the counter-narcotics fight. The numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) remain steady at 941 families registered in Lashkar Gah. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Operation Moshtarak continued on February 15 in Nad Ali district; however, reports throughout the operational area indicate that the situation was relatively quiet. The civilian component of the operation stands ready and willing to go into Marjah once conditions permit. This report is a situational update, reflecting the activities that took place in conjunction with Operation Moshtarak on February 15, 2010.

POLITICAL UPDATE

¶3. (SBU) ISAF Commander met with federal, provincial and district leadership during his visit to Lashkar Gah and areas within the conflict zone on February 15. In the north Nad Ali area of Showal, Interior Minister Atmar, Defense Minister Wardak, Governor Mangal, General Za Zai (205 Commander Hero Corps of the ANA) and COMISAF were briefed by ANA and ANP commanders on the latest on the operations within Showal. The ANA commanders noted that they discovered approximately 45 IEDs on the first day of the operations and praised the coordination taking place among the ANA, the ANP and the ISAF. ANP Commander Colonel Tariq said that the resistance in Showal lasted less than an hour and that most of the insurgents escaped to the areas still unsecured to the northwest and northeast. According to the ANSF leadership, the next mission was to pave the way for the arrival of the police, as well as to clear the road of IEDs so that the area's residents had freedom of movement to and from Lashkar Gah.

¶4. (SBU) Following the briefing, the ministerial delegation, including Commander of Regional Command-South (RC-S) and PRT Lashkar Gah, accompanied by international press, conducted a walking tour of Showal village. The UK Battle group based in Showal reported that the community had held a number of shuras over the past few days and

the atmospherics of the area (such as women again in the streets) were extremely good. Under a waving GIROA flag where a Taliban flag had been flying just days before, RC-S Commander spoke with a group of local young men, who stressed to the Major General that, above all, they needed the ANSF and ISAF to remain in the area to keep them safe and not abandon them.

15. (SBU) In a February 15 briefing for Deputy Defense Minister Bismullah Khan, Deputy Interior Minister Mangal and Commander of ISAF Joint Command (COMIJC), Nad Ali District Governor Habibullah explained his thoughts on how his district would develop following Operation Moshtarak. Habibullah explained that in order for Nad Ali to succeed, it would need greater support from the central government for district governance, better command and control for the ANP, and greater numbers of ANA. Following the briefing, Bismullah Khan told Habibullah he would commend him highly to the Minister of the Independent Directorate for Local Governance and request every possible support be sent to Nad Ali to ensure GIROA continues to be successful. (Note: Early next week, Habibullah is planning a shura of elders from across the District. End Note.)

16. (SBU) At the Regimental Combat Team (RCT) at FOB Dwyer, seven Marjah elders from the 34 Marjah "executive committee" arrived and met with Nad Ali Deputy District Governor Haji Zahir and various civilian and military personnel in preparation for their visit to Marjah that evening. (Note: Although not present at the RCT, the Marjah shura is chaired by Abdul Rahman Jan (ARJ), former Helmand Chief of Police, who remains highly interested in the governance formation of Marjah. ARJ's nephew is also on the shura, and he made the trip to Marjah. End Note.) The shura will stay in the area for at least the next several days and may play a leading role if there are Taliban coming forward to reintegrate. We will continue to work

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with Haji Zahir, the sub-district governor for Marjah, as our primary point of contact on governance issues there.

MEDIA UPDATES

17. (SBU) The February 15 COMISAF press conference at the Helmand Governor's Media Centre received significant coverage from the local press corps, with approximately thirty Kabul-based Afghan journalists and reporters from the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, USA Today, the Financial Times and The Times (UK). Minister of Defense Wardak called on insurgents to reconcile, saying, "We are calling on all Afghan opposition groups - this is your country, this is your soil... Without you, we cannot achieve national unity." While Interior Minister Atmar put a lot of emphasis on the civilian casualty issue, he said, "We may have lost nine people, but we managed to liberate thousands of others." Later, he gave an interview on CNN in which he attributed responsibility for the casualties to "our forces," and made no mention of ISAF or foreign forces with respect to the incident. He added, "It's not just a military operation. It is an integrated civilian, military and development operation."

COUNTER-NARCOTICS

18. (SBU) On February 15 in the Grupi Shesh area of Nad Ali district, Governor Mangal announced the beginning of the Governor's Led Eradication (GLE) Campaign for Nad Ali. (Background: The UK-funded GLE Campaign acts as the "stick" to the alternative livelihood program's "carrot" for farmers when the poppy planting season comes around in late summer/fall.) Accompanied by the Helmand Director of Agriculture, other line ministers, and a number of Afghan media outlets, Mangal deployed twenty eradication tractors, with provincially-hired drivers, from his fleet of approximately 110 tractors to clear Nad Ali. In a statement to the media, Mangal stated that poppy cultivation within Helmand would be reduced by 50 percent this year. (Note: The UN Office of Drug Control projects that poppy cultivation levels to remain stable in Helmand this year. End Note.)

IDP Update

¶9. (SBU) According to the Department of Refugees and Repatriation in Lashkar Gah, the number of internally displaced families remains at 941 for February 15. According to unofficial reports, the International Committee of the Red Cross in Marjah has seen the return of some families back into the area and ISAF troops have helped look after these returnees.

COMMENT

¶10. (SBU) The Marjah shura is a collection of elders who have pledged their support to the operation and Governor Mangal. They have shown initiative in working toward the future of Marjah and Nad Ali district as a whole, but Mangal and many local residents understand these elders place their interests first and this must be kept in mind. Mangal and Atmar both stated that these men have an immediate use but it remains unclear whether GIROA will be strong enough to have a lasting control over this body.

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